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**TFG**

***“What to do with so much sorrow?”: Art and the Purpose  
of Revenge in Margaret Atwood’s *Hag-Seed****

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Thus, to revenge yourself upon someone is to reliberate yourself, because before doing the revenge, you aren't free. What holds you in thrall? Your obsession with your own hatred of the other, your own vengefulness. You feel that you can't shake free of it except through revenge. The score that needs to be settled is a psychic score, and the kind of debt that can't be paid with money is a psychic debt. It's a wound to the soul. (Atwood, 2008: 150)

## Table of Contents

<b>Abstract</b>	1
<b>1. Introduction</b>	2
1.1. Prospero as “the Artist”	3
1.2. Prospero as “the Avenger”	5
1.3. <i>Hag-Seed</i>	7
<b>2. Chapter One: Trauma</b>	9
2.1. Prospero	9
2.2. Felix	12
<b>3. Chapter Two: Revenge</b>	18
3.1. Prospero	19
3.2. Felix	21
<b>4. Chapter Three: Forgiveness</b>	25
4.1. Prospero	25
4.2. Felix	27
<b>5. Conclusion</b>	32
<b>6. Bibliography</b>	35

## Abstract

Margaret Atwood's *Hag-Seed* is a postmodern, post-Christian reinterpretation of Shakespeare's *Tempest*, staging Felix Phillips as Prospero in the context of 21<sup>st</sup> century Canada. The nature of Prospero's morality has been an important subject in academic discussion, which can broadly be categorised into "the Artist" and "the Avenger". Atwood's allocation of Felix as an avenger and principle agent of his profane purpose, which entails a metafictional, drug-infused production of *The Tempest* to cause his enemies to suffer in retaliation, provides reflections on the nature of revenge and morality in our current society. Furthermore, Felix's narrative incorporates two backstories which unfold the origin of his thirst for vengeance: his termination as Artistic Director ensued the traumatic loss of his wife and daughter. Felix will undergo a journey of healing through his artistic creativity culminating in his ability to face his grief and, ultimately, forgive himself. Therefore, in this present-day interpretation of *The Tempest*, art replaces the supernatural power to restore justice and grant absolution to its characters.

## 1. Introduction

In commemoration of 400 years since Shakespeare's death, *Hogarth Press* launched the *Hogarth Shakespeare Project*, initiating in the autumn of 2015. This consists of a collection of famous Shakespearian plays appropriated and retold by eight distinguished contemporary authors, one of which, published a year later, is *Hag-Seed* by Margaret Atwood. *Hag-Seed* is a reinterpretation of *The Tempest* which successfully manages to incorporate the glories and turmoils of the traditional cast and castaways in the context of 21st century Canada. As is the case with all re-enactments, Atwood's characters are moulded both by the author's interpretation of the original text and the cultural circumstances that determine and encompass our present-day society. The disposition of Shakespeare's Prospero has sparked great debate amongst scholars for decades as his performance within the play has increasingly come to be perceived as a deeply ambivalent one. A Stephen Orgel argues: Prospero has been regarded in radical divergence depending on how the character resonates in each socio-historic context:

*The Tempest* is a text that looks different in different contexts, and it has been used to support radically differing claims about Shakespeare's allegiances. In recent years we have seen Prospero as a noble ruler and mage, a tyrant and megalomaniac, a necromancer, a Neoplatonic scientist, a colonial imperialist, a civilizer. [...] The question of correctness is not the issue of these readings; the play will provide at least some evidence for all of them, and its critical history is a good index to the ambivalences and ambiguities of the text. (Orgel, 1987: 11)

As a post-modern reinterpretation of *The Tempest*, *Hag-Seed* cannot but reflect Margaret Atwood's attempt to relocate Prospero—as—Felix Phillips within a specific framework. For the sake of scaffolding this dissertation, I will analyse the two main schools of thought in regard to Prospero's character: "Prospero the Artist" and "Prospero the Avenger", to both situate Atwood's Felix and offer an explanation as to why this choice was made. For this reason, my analysis will be based on the following: agency, Art, and Purpose.

### 1.1. Prospero as “the Artist”

There is a long tradition of critics who regard the protagonist “as a human providence or guardian angel” (Frye, 1986: 172), a “hero more sinned against than sinning” (Egan, 1972: 171), and the ultimate Artist par excellence, whose greatness could only commensurate with that of Shakespeare himself (James, 1907). In this line of thought, “Prospero is [...] the representative of wise and virtuous manhood [...] He—the wise and good man—is the ruling power, to whom the whole series is subject” (Kemble, 1882: 132). In this sense, after having spent years “bettering [his] mind” (1.2.90) “rapt in secret studies” (1.2.77), Prospero is considered a learned sage who was dearly loved by his people (1.2.141) before his “false brother/ Awakened an evil nature” (1.2.92-93) and robbed him of his dukedom. This position leads the sole focus of blame to be on perfidious Antonio, whom Prospero loved as much as he did his own daughter Miranda (1.2.68-69), consequently conferring the position of innocent victim on Prospero. Here, the Duke is anything but a tyrant and he is portrayed as using his Art for “the greater good”:

his Art, being the Art of supernatural virtue which belongs to the redeemed world of civility and learning, is the antithesis of the black magic of Sycorax. Caliban’s deformity is the result of evil natural magic, and it stands as a natural criterion by which we measure the world of Art, represented by Prospero’s divine magic and the supernaturally sanctioned beauty of Miranda and Ferdinand. (Kermode, 1986: xli)

Firstly, Kermode suggests that Prospero has been spiritually anointed by his Art, which has the capacity of morphing into different shapes throughout the play (Frye, 1986: 182). For Kermode, the essence of this Art is supernatural virtue, a reading other scholars, such as Berry (1978), Doran (1964) and Frye (1986), within this position share. In short, Prospero’s Art enables his “own discovery of an ethic of forgiveness” and, subsequently, the discernment to “[renunciate] his magical power” (Doran, 1964: 327) once his revels are ended (4.1.48).



Secondly, a crucial notion for this stance which is related to the previous belief of Divine appointment, is the concept of being “naturally” good or evil. If Prospero’s Art “is the antithesis of the black magic of Sycorax” and “Caliban’s deformity is the result of evil natural magic” (Kermode, 1986: xli), then this means that Prospero must be “naturally” good, and thus is an agent of “providence divine” (1.2.159). The “supernaturally sanctioned beauty of Miranda and Ferdinand” (Kermode, 1986: xli) contrast sharply with Earthly Caliban’s (Kemble, 1882) physical deformity. Therefore, within this area of criticism, a characters’ physical representation attests their virtue.

Finally, in light of this innate goodness, “Prospero’s own discovery of an ethic of forgiveness” (Doran, 1964: 327) plays a fundamental role. Prospero the Artist works under two main authorities: first and foremost, God’s power, and secondly Shakespeare’s pen. There are bountiful quotes and references to Prospero constantly working alongside “bountiful Fortune/ (now [his] dear Lady)” (1.2.178-179) who takes the form of “A most auspicious star” which he fully depends on for the plan to succeed (1.2.181-184). Within this school of thought, these attributions are not questioned, precisely because they show the Artist’s moral goodness as an appointed disciple. Regarding the second authority, The Bard’s creation of “the tragicomic form enabled him to concentrate the whole story of apparent disaster, penitence, and forgiveness into one happy misfortune, controlled by divine Art” (Kermode, 1986: lix). In other words, Shakespeare—*The Artist*—created, by his own art, an arena where Prospero will act as a divine agent of retribution, turning his hardship (tragic) into an opportunity to unite his perpetrators together on the island, with the sole purpose of forgiveness and social reintegration (comic). In fact, the author’s role is so important for the understanding of the play, that a large body criticism (James: 1907, and Strachey: 1922 amongst others), generally within this school of thought, has viewed Prospero’s Art as Shakespeare’s process of creation and the concluding

breaking of the staff as “the playwright himself announcing his decision to give up the theatre” (Girard, 1991: 344).

## 1.2. Prospero as “the Avenger”

The second main position regarding Prospero’s intentions, which is currently the central approach in modern criticism of *The Tempest*, and the mode of analysis I will adopt for this paper, is in stark contrast with its predecessor. Arguably, recent interpretations of Prospero as both father and magician are in reaction to the benign patriarch of traditional critics. As Orgel further explains:

For *The Tempest* to represent the crowning moment of the dramatist’s career, to express a sufficiently genial farewell to his art, or even to achieve the reconciliation and restoration that seems to be implied by the genre of comedy, a good deal has always had to either be emended or overlooked. (Orgel, 1987: 11)

Very much in line with this thought, Harry Berger comments:

I find it hard to accept this reading as it stands, not because it is wrong, but because it does not hit the play where it lives. The renunciation pattern is there, but only as a general tendency against which the main thrust of the play strains. There are too many cues and clues, too many quirky details, pointing in other directions, and critics have been able to make renunciation in this simple form the central action only by ignoring those details (Berger, 1969: 254)

In short, the unproblematic interpretation of Prospero as being solely motivated as a divine agent of retribution, and whose purpose is a restoration of values and community through forgiveness, fails to incorporate a view which is truthful to the text in all its complexity. In this sense, the overall feeling which characterizes this position is that of skepticism. If Prospero’s actions can be perceived as morally dubious, then his entire Purpose becomes problematic, ultimately leading to more radical readings such as Jan Kott’s:

The true *Tempest* is serious and severe, lyrical and grotesque [...] it is a passionate reckoning with the real world. [One] has to go back to Shakespeare’s text and to Shakespeare’s theatre. One has to see in it a drama of the men of the Renaissance, [...] *The Tempest* will then become a drama of lost illusions, of bitter wisdom, and a fragile –though stubborn–hope [...] The world of the Renaissance was a cruel and dramatic world, which suddenly exposed both the power, and misery of man; a world in which nature and history,

royal power, and morality, have for the first time been deprived of theological meaning.  
(Kott, 1964: 179-180)

In this passage, Kott places great emphasis on locating *The Tempest* within its Renaissance framework to see the text in its raw form. From his point of view, this “true *Tempest*” has a much darker undertone, as opposed to the more forgiving picture painted by critics who held the former perspective. By contextualising *The Tempest* within its Renaissance origin, we are forced to consider the questions of that time with reference to power relations and society’s theological stance. Kott is not suggesting that the play should only be viewed simply as a product of Jacobean ideology, but that appropriations of the text can vary significantly depending on the sociohistorical setting (Kott, 1964:178). As Coleridge wrote on Shakespeare’s *Tempest*: “the language in which these truths are expressed was not drawn from any set fashion, but from the profoundest depths of [Shakespeare’s] moral being, and is therefore for all ages” (Coleridge, 1836: 102). Thus, what does characterise a reading within a specific age is *which* truths are given a more prominent role, hence the multiple interpretations of Prospero’s morality.

As the name itself suggests, Prospero as “an Avenger” is a merciless character whose Purpose is getting even with those who wronged him. This vengeance is orchestrated through his, no longer divine, Art:

these are not powers naturally accruing to him; they were gained by years of seclusion and study (which cost him his dukedom), and they are embodied not in Prospero himself but in such objects as his books, his staff, and his magic garment. Without his books, says Caliban, “He’s but a sot, as I am” (III.ii.91). (Egan, 1972:174)

The origin of Prospero’s powers come from close and dedicated bettering of his mind through his books (1.2.89-90), with no specification as to which these are, and other material items such as his staff and cloak, without which his Art is minimal. This is evident in Act 1, Scene 2 where Miranda is asked to help her father remove his magic garment, whereupon Prospero says, “Lie there my art” (23-25). Therefore, in this line of thought, the plot is able to develop not by

celestial intervention, but rather through Prospero's books and commands over Ariel (who does possess supernatural powers).

Consequent to this spiritual detachment, Prospero's motives are no longer associated with carrying out God's will of retribution, but rather pursuing his, earthly, personal agenda of revenge, placing the character as a traumatised perpetrator as opposed to a long-suffering but passive victim. For lack of a Higher system of moral retribution, Prospero will take it upon himself to ensure justice will be served and the culprits will learn their lesson:

He shipwrecks the Court party with the specific intention of subjecting Alonso, Antonio, and Sebastian to an ordeal of self-knowledge and purgation [...] But it is precisely this assumption of god-like powers and responsibilities by one who is in no way superhuman that precipitates the central problem of the play. (Egan, 1972: 175)

In conclusion, the current critical response to Shakespeare's Prospero is based on the recognition that he is governed by the *irrational* need to seek revenge for the wrongs committed against him, assuming a much more destructive, even sadistic, role than he could even acknowledge. Therefore, his Purpose will not be one of reconciliation and renewal of his society, but to use his profane Art with the sole intent of retaliation.

### **1.3. *Hag-Seed***

In *Hag-Seed*, Margaret Atwood very successfully manages to encode Prospero's ambiguity in her main character Felix Phillips. As in the case of Prospero, our interpretation of Atwood's character is made to depend on the degree of sympathy we feel towards him, and how we ultimately interpret his purpose. *The Guardian* did not stop short of asserting that: "Felix is a fabulous character. Although he's utterly idiotic and sometimes despicable" (16/10/16), clearly, such a character will be difficult to reconcile with the description of Prospero as a wise sage held by the first school of thought. Yet, Felix is the Artistic Director at *Makeshiweg Theatre Festival*, and quite simply lives for the world of theatre, often acting in his own productions. His Art, thus, is intrinsically linked to his *modus vivendi*, inclining the

reader to see him as Felix the Artist. However, on the other hand, when he is fired from his position by Tony and The Board, disabling him from practicing his Art, he becomes dangerously obsessed with retribution, conceding him the title of Felix the Avenger. In this sense, Atwood does assume a clear standpoint which sets the background tone for the unfolding of events. Felix is thirsty for revenge for Tony's betrayal and goes to extreme lengths to stage it:

Felix is the wronged artistic director of a Canadian theatre festival. He has been cast aside thanks to the interventions of a Machiavellian rival just at the moment when he was about to unleash his greatest creation upon the world – an ambitious production of *The Tempest*. It was to have been a play that would lay to rest all the failures of his life and career. It was also an act of grieving to mark the death of his daughter Miranda. [...] And so we have a play within a play within a novel.

Felix, evidently the Prospero of the piece, has to wait 12 years to get his revenge by creating a storm of his own. But when it comes it's inventive and delightful. He gets a job as an acting tutor in a correctional facility. He persuades his students that they want to stage "his" *Tempest*, even reincorporating the actress he originally intended as Miranda. And he invites some high-ups in the government to see the progress he's making with the inmates – and get extra financial support for the programme. It just so happens that one of these officials is his nemesis, Tony, who has gone on to greater things as the minister of heritage, having used the coveted artistic director role as a stepping stone. And, boy, is Tony about to find out what retribution means. (The Guardian 16/10/16)

There is absolutely no doubt that the "sole drift of [Felix's] purpose doth extend" (5.1.29) exclusively to make Tony and Sal (the Heritage Minister) atone for their wrongdoing. In fact, we follow the protagonist from his fall, through his twelve years of hiding and wallowing, until he once again takes the stage and torments his enemies in a drug-infused real-life production of *The Tempest*.

Therefore, considering that this 21<sup>st</sup> century rewriting of *The Tempest* stages a character completely unbalanced under the weight of grief, who is resolved to take justice into his own hands to redress his grievance, raises important moral questions about forgiveness in our society. Is there forgiveness if there is no Higher regulation of moral conduct? If there is forgiveness, on what basis is this granted? Furthermore, without this innate moral goodness, how will Felix know when revenge has been sufficiently served? And lastly, how will Felix

manage to stage his revenge—without the help of a system of divine justice—and what significance will this have in modern society?

In this dissertation, I intend to discuss these three main questions while juxtaposing them with the postmodern, post-Christian reality in which they arise. Furthermore, I will examine the fundamental differences between the two texts: *The Tempest* and *Hag-Seed*, in regard to the nature of pain in their fall, the role of art in their vengeance, and ultimately the treatment of forgiveness in their healing. Finally, I will also deliberate on the general function of art and forgiveness in our contemporary society, seen through Atwood's novel.

## **2. Chapter One: Trauma**

Although Felix and Prospero share many qualities and objectives, the motives that propel the two towards revenge are rather different. Their almost insane obsession with retaliation stems from emotional wounds which we learn about early on in both texts, which set the scene for the chain of events we later witness. However, as I will argue in this chapter, the seeds of revenge in each case are not of the same species, and therefore condition greatly character development and, ultimately, their curtain call.

### **2.1. Prospero**

Within the cynical view of Prospero “the Avenger”, Kott stated that “Prospero’s narrative is a description of a struggle for power, of violence and conspiracy” (Kott, 1964: 182). Though this encapsulates Prospero’s conflict well, perhaps it could be rephrased as *the* narrative of struggle for power *through* conspiracy and violence. Deprived of his dukedom and shipwrecked on a desert island with his daughter and two non-human characters; Ariel and Caliban, Prospero must establish his role within this new community:

The language of *The Tempest* asserts ‘power’, in the broadest sense, to be the subject of the dramatic discourse. But within this are certain categories are discernible. I perceive three main groups. The first is purely social, the hierarchies [...] for his own government: duke, counsellor, servant. The second is familial [...] directly concerned with father-child relationships. The final group is divine power. (Berry, 1978: 104)

Therefore, Prospero's narrative is dominated by his assertion of power and the cause and effect his relationship with it will have. The protagonist will often resort to violence, specifically through the use of magic to maintain this power. As Berry comments, Prospero's power can be viewed primarily from three angles: social, familial, and the supernatural, his procession of these will be dealt with in different ways depending on its conformation.

Prospero's story begins with his dialogue with Miranda in Act 1, Scene 2:

thee my daughter- who  
Art ignorant of what thou art, naught knowing  
Of whence I am, nor that I am more better  
Than Prospero, master of a full poor cell,  
And thy no greater father. (1.2.17-21).

Prospero is about to enlighten Miranda on the truth surrounding their inhabitancy on the Island, which plays into the young girl's *bildung*, specifically her loss of innocence, initiated with the enemies' shipwreck in Scene 1. Despite being set apart from society itself, the magician still gives himself two titles: first and foremost, "Prospero, master of a full poor cell" (1.2.20) and then "thy no greater father" (1.2.21). After twelve years in the wild, he still views himself as "more better" (1.2.19) and of being in a position of power and distinction. We do come to learn through Caliban that Prospero "by his cunning hath/ cheated [him] of the island." (3.2.41-42), which not only shows us his obsession with being in a position of power even outside of society, which he fought to achieve through his Art, but questions the legitimacy of his discourse of victimhood.

PROSPERO

My brother and thy uncle, called Antonio [...] he whom next thyself  
Of all the world I loved, and to him put  
The manage of my state, as at the time  
Through all the signories it was the first  
And Prospero the primer Duke, being so reputed  
In dignity, and for the liberal arts  
Without a parallel; those being all my study,  
The government I cast upon my brother  
And to my state grew stranger, being transported  
And rapt in secret studies. Thy false uncle-  
Dost thou attend me? (1.2.66-79)

This rich passage gives us great insight into the psychology of multifaceted Prospero. Once again, he assigns himself an array of roles; “Prospero the primer Duke” (1.2.70), the person he was and strives to become again, Prospero the brother and father, in short, the “family man”, and finally, Prospero “rapt in secret studies” (1.2.78), the magician, whom I will discuss further in the following chapter. There is something fundamental in common with all three characters, namely that they are all authority figures and find it difficult not to see themselves as such.

Clearly, Prospero was the Duke of Milan, a well reputed and important person who had, just for his three-year-old daughter “four or five women [who] once tended [her]” (1.2.47). But, although the Duke enjoyed the status and power, he did not enjoy the responsibility which it came with: “I, thus neglecting worldly ends, all dedicated/ To closeness and the bettering of my mind” (1.2. 89-90). He was already beginning to be deeply interested in his “rough magic” (5.1.50), which in itself is another form of power he will use to win the island over later on. In other words, for want of more power while neglecting his existing duties, he has been stripped of one of his titles and shipped off to a desert island, where he will establish new forms of power such as the governing over Caliban and Ariel and his magical capacities.

How Prospero reveals himself to his daughter reflects his version of the offense. Ultimately, he depicts himself as a good Duke, esteemed by his people (1.2.72-73) whose brother traumatically wronged him. As René Girard points out: “Prospero [...] portrays himself as a naive victim, an idealist interested solely in books, totally alien to the passion he passionately dissects” (Girard, 1991: 349). However, this is the Duke’s vision *a posteriori*, warped from the transgression that happened over a decade earlier: “Hence Prospero’s authority to tell the story as though it were the “truth” [...] is dubious at best” (Breight, 1990: 10). His distorted vision comes from “His years of seclusion in his library [which] have instilled in him a moral perspective rooted not in the real world but in the ideals of his art” (Egan, 1972: 176)



and it is precisely this art with which he has enforced his moral code on the island, as well as being his sword of justice when the outsiders come ashore.

In the same vein, Prospero has raised Miranda to mirror his ideals of goodness, representing the innocent daughter who never thought to question anything beyond their lives as she knew them (1.2.22-23), and who weeps compassionately at the thought of some noble creature perishing in the tempest (1.2.5-9). Perhaps his initial downgrade in status and loss of power in society is what made Prospero the ever-controlling father that he is, specifically evident with his idea that Ferdinand will “take his possession away from him”. As Girard further explains: “He sincerely loves his daughter, but he is pompous, self-righteous, authoritarian, and highly theatrical. All these faults point to something in his past, a great wrong done to him he cannot forget.” (Girard, 1991: 349). Prospero’s grip on his daughter is so tight because the pain is still raw from the time when his brother stole his dukedom from him, and with that his ruling power.

## **2.2. Felix**

Margaret Atwood’s Felix Phillips is strongly based on a revenge-fuelled, unambiguous version of Prospero, which reinforces the interpretation of “the Avenger”. In the case of Felix, his sense of victimhood is even more intense, and therefore, his obsession with retaliation is severely increased. Although both “Dukes” share a narrative of being abused, the context is explicitly different in the contemporary tale, the cause of which is worthy of examination.

Like Prospero, Felix is robbed of his distinguished position and is cast away out of society for twelve years, however, *unlike* Prospero, he is now a recent widower who has lost his only daughter Miranda to meningitis.

Felix was the Artistic Director, as Tony kept reminding him, and he was at the height of his powers, or so they kept saying in the reviews; therefore he ought to concern himself with higher aims. And he did concern himself with higher aims. To create the lushest, the

most beautiful, the most awe-inspiring, the most inventive, the most numinous theatrical experiences ever. To [...] have the audience leave, after the performance, staggering a little as if drunk. (Atwood, 2016: 11-12)

Prior to his two losses, Felix had the title, promising projects of great artistic quality and even someone, Tony, to take care of all the paraphernalia belonging to the job, something which Felix relied on more and more after the tragic events: “*Let me do this chore for you, delegate that, send me instead.* What a fool he had been. His only excuse was that he’d been distracted by grief at that time.” (Atwood: 11). Tony used Felix’s title as Artistic *Director* to push Felix “to concern himself with higher aims”-Felix’s equivalent to Prospero’s books- while creating a gap for himself to wiggle into and slowly but surely gain a name and reputation for himself: “Tony, that self-promoting, posturing little shit” (Atwood: 10). These higher aims included putting on shocking and inspiring performances with the intention of stupefying the audience which were, as Felix puts it, “no mean goals” (Atwood: 12).

In this sense, Felix’s motives are also aspirational, however, there are important differences between his and Prospero’s. First of all, Felix does not want to gain more power for himself in a controlling sense, as he is already at the top of his game as Artistic Director of the Makeshiweg Theatre Festival, although we do discover later on through his conversation with Toni that his critical “reviews of late [had] been...mixed” (Atwood: 21). At the point before his termination, Felix claims that his objective is to “make the Makeshiweg Festival the standard against which all lesser theatre festivals would be measured” (Atwood: 12). On these grounds, Felix’s motivation to “put on the best show” is for the recognition of Art, *his* Artistic creation:

Those escapades, those flights of fancy, those triumphs had been the brainchildren of an earlier Felix. They’d been acts of jubilation, of happy exuberance. In the time just before Tony’s coup, things had changed. They had darkened, and darkened so suddenly. *Howl, howl, howl...*  
But he could not howl. (Atwood: 13-14)

This passage shows clearly Felix's emotional link with his Art. Not only were the performances a main source of his happiness, but they were personal "Triumphs for him, every one of those roles! And every one of his productions!" (Atwood: 13). Accordingly, Felix will feel his betrayal even more strongly as he will be deprived of the possibility to exercise his talent for several years after his termination: unlike Prospero whose powers flourish and grow on the island, Felix built his dukedom on his artistic creativity.

As the excerpt reveals, Felix's moments of creative birth are "escapes" and, ultimately, "flights of fancy" (Atwood: 13). In spite of the father's genuine dedication to theatre, his fixation with putting on the ultimate performance rings as a frenzied attempt to escape reality, as opposed to the Romantic conception as a sublime, visionary experience. As Martha Nussbaum comments:

The idea that payback makes sense, counterbalancing the injury, is ubiquitous and very likely evolutionary. Still, what else may make people cling to it? One factor is surely an unwillingness to grieve or to accept helplessness. Most of us are helpless with respect to many things, including the life and safety of those we love. It feels a lot better if we can form a payback project and get busy executing it (suing the bad doctor, depriving one's ex of child custody) than to accept loss and the real condition of helplessness in which life has left us. (Nussbaum, 2016: 29)

Therefore, through staging *The Tempest*, Felix manages to both satisfy his need for revenge, and elude his grief and agency in his fall. Thus, in Atwood's post-modern society, art is inherently linked to the process of grievance seen through Felix's initial evasion followed by a journey of healing.

Additionally, there is a direct acknowledgement to Shakespeare's Caliban in the extract: "*Howl, howl, howl...*/ But he could not howl." (Atwood: 14). Despite the fact that "If anything, in this day and age Caliban is the favourite [and] everyone cheers for him" (Atwood: 21), Caliban does not have an established representation in *Hag-Seed*. At Fletcher, Leggs will perform the role for the live performance, but outside this, Caliban does not take a specific shape, unlike all other important characters: Felix as Prospero, Miranda's projection as

Miranda and Ariel, Anne-Marie as Miranda, Toni as Antonio, Sal as Alonso, Lonnie as Gonzalo, and Freddie as Ferdinand. There are instances like these, when the reader is prompted to identify Felix as Caliban, perhaps as a symbolic acknowledgement of “this thing of darkness” (5.1.275-276), but such a representation would be too systematic and would fail to be true in terms of plot and Felix’s own development, hence why he “could not howl” (Atwood: 14).

Since the world of theatre had always been Felix’s main priority, he happily took the opportunity to turn away from his responsibilities as a public persona and pursue the “perfect performance”. While Felix was busy “[headhunting] the most admired scenery and costume designers of his day” (Atwood: 12) along with other necessary technical arrangements, Tony was “finding the money” (Atwood: 12) to put the ambitious productions together. As Felix reflects: “Tony had been all too eager to liberate Felix from the rituals Felix hated” (Atwood: 13) which were essentially attending public events and trying to receive funding from different boards. “Rituals” that meant being the face of the Festival and making contacts. Consequently, Felix will have to pay a great price for “neglecting [his] worldly ends” (1.2.89)

That devious, twisted bastard, Tony, is Felix’s own fault. Or mostly his fault. Over the past twelve years he’s often blamed himself. He gave Tony too much scope, he didn’t supervise, he didn’t look over Tony’s nattily suited, padded, pinstriped shoulder. He didn’t pick up on the clues, [...] [w]orse: he’d trusted the evil-hearted, social-clambering, Machiavellian foot-licker. He’d fallen for the act (Atwood: 11)

After twelve years, Felix is able to accept that he was not performing his job correctly and was too lenient with Tony, who in turn took careful advantage of this. What is most interesting here is that, quite unlike Shakespeare’s Prospero, Felix mostly blames himself. Although Tony was “devious” and “twisted” (Atwood: 11), Felix ultimately sees himself as the culprit of his situation and, as he argues, even if he had not lost his loved ones “he’d most likely have been ambushed” (Atwood: 11). This is chronologically very important as, crucially, Tony’s betrayal was subsequent to Felix’s loss, giving the character a deeper profile and darker nature.

The post-modern addition of loss and bereavement to the quadricentennial tale shifts the focus of the reading and our relationship with the characters. The fact that the tragedy of the death of his newly-wed wife is explained right at the beginning of the novel (Atwood: 14), immediately followed by that of his three-year-old daughter Miranda (Atwood: 15), tolls the bells letting us know that this story is going to be a long, painful journey of grief for the protagonist. “Felix the Avenger” is somehow given more credibility and his motives for retaliation are more grounded. Felix is in constant agony over his three losses: his wife, Miranda, and finally, his space to create. Perhaps Atwood felt that Prospero’s vengeance was not sufficiently warranted, especially considering that his life on the island with Miranda was peaceful, and he even had authority over those who inhabited it. Perhaps angelical Miranda could not have belonged to our contemporary society as Atwood seems to present it as a very corrupt scenario. Or perhaps the postmodern, post-Christian reader rejects a depiction of people as being essentially “good” or “bad” and therefore their evil actions must be given a logical explanation. Whichever the reason, the author’s inclusion of this new dimension is clearly deliberate and hence it should be explored.

The first tragedy Felix must face is the passing of his wife:

His wife, Nadia, was the first to leave him, barely a year after their marriage. It was a late marriage for him, and an unexpected one: he hadn’t known he was capable of that kind of love. He was just discovering her virtues, just getting to really know her, when she’d died of a galloping staph infection right after childbirth. Such things happened, despite modern medicine. He still tries to recall her image, make her vivid for himself once more, but over the years she’s moved gently away from him, fading like an old Polaroid. Now she’s little more than an outline; an outline he fills with sadness. (Atwood: 14)

This is the only mention of Felix’s wife in the novel, yet it is poignant and deeply sentimental. Felix portrays his loss as a being excessively quick and painful; he unexpectedly found love which he had not considered possible, and right after the birth of their daughter Miranda, she passed away. There is a predominant feeling of helplessness and desperate unfairness over the situation, as if he was led to love just to suffer. Felix’s narrative is entirely different to

Prospero's two lines on Miranda's mother: "Thy mother was a piece of virtue, and/ She said thou wast my daughter" (1.2.56-57). Not only is she not even given a name, but Prospero describes Miranda's mother as a "piece of virtue", which, in a very objectifying manner, suggests that she was true to him (Orgel, 1984: 1).<sup>1</sup> Atwood's incorporation of this short backstory draws Felix much closer to the reader, as we see him as a grieving widower "on his own with his newborn daughter, Miranda" (Atwood: 14):

He'd hired help, of course he'd needed some women, since he knew nothing about the practical side of baby care, and because of his work he couldn't be there with Miranda all the time. But he'd spent every free moment he could with her. Though there hadn't been many free moments. (Atwood: 14)

In exactly the same way as he would later on at the Festival, Felix hires other people to carry out half of the obligations that come with his job. In order to fully dedicate himself to his Art, Felix had Miranda taken care of by "some women" (Atwood: 14). This scene is almost a forewarning of the events which will later cost him his job. Felix will take full responsibility for Miranda's death as he had given strict instructions to her carers not to disturb him during rehearsals, when Miranda took ill and passed away with Meningitis.

Notwithstanding, there is a fundamental grievance against Toni and The Board which Felix cannot seem to get over. After Miranda's death, Felix turned to his Art for full emotional support:

What to do with so much sorrow? It was like an enormous black cloud boiling up over the horizon. No: it was like a blizzard. No: it was like nothing he could put into language. He couldn't face it head-on. He had to transform it, or at the very least enclose it. Right after the funeral with its pathetically small coffin he'd plunged himself into *The Tempest*. It was an evasion, he knew that much about himself even then, but it was also to be a kind of reincarnation. (Atwood: 15)

By trying to stage *The Tempest*, Felix hoped to bring his daughter back through Shakespeare's character Miranda, and be her father once more. However, even Felix knew at the time that this

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<sup>1</sup> Her virtue is, in fact, the only evidence Prospero gives that he is Miranda's father and she is his heir.

was always going to be a futile attempt but still argued: “didn’t the best art have desperation at its core? Wasn’t it always a challenge to Death?” (Atwood: 16). When it fell apart with his termination at the Festival, Felix was crushed as it also meant that Miranda’s rebirth would never happen (Atwood: 17).

Therefore, Felix assumes the role of “the Avenger” due to the pain and suffering he sustains. Felix’s sense of victimhood is much greater than Prospero’s in this contemporary rewriting of *The Tempest* as the two backstories illustrate the origin of his extreme grief, which do not appear in the original narrative. Furthermore, Felix carries a heavy weight of guilt as he feels solely responsible for the loss of Miranda and not fulfilling all of his obligations as Artistic Director, with a considerable amount of anger directed towards Toni for taking advantage of his situation. In this sense, Felix’s revenge is a direct consequence of his personal trauma, which makes the character much more human, and thus, identifiable to the postmodern reader, than Prospero’s narrative of political betrayal over a noble title. Nonetheless, Felix’s narration of events, like Prospero’s, is highly dubious due to his emotional state, making him an extremely unreliable narrator.

### **3. Chapter Two: Revenge**

As one body of criticism argues, Prospero “the Avenger” is primarily preoccupied with getting his revenge against those, specifically his brother Antonio, who deprived him of his dukedom. To achieve this, Prospero uses his Art and his power over Ariel to produce such as storm which will gather his enemies on the island which he has complete control over. Felix’s narrative has a similar storyline, with some additions which have been discussed in Chapter 1, and he too, is completely absorbed in his purpose to stage a *Tempest* which will guarantee retribution. Therefore, in this chapter I will analyse both the essence of their art and the objectives of their purpose.

### 3.1. Prospero

As we have seen, Prospero's preoccupation with his love of books (1.2.166) cost him his dukedom and the exile with his daughter on the island. There he has been able to exercise his art, undisturbed for twelve years until the fateful storm was conjured up. However, what exactly is his art within the adopted framework? As, Harold Goddard writes:

What is the character of Prospero's magic? If it is not black art, it certainly is not "white" in the sense of being dedicated unreservedly to noble ends. Prospero was indeed the victim of injustice. But his main miracle, the raising of the tempest, appears to have been undertaken primarily to get his enemies within his power for purposes of revenge. (Goddard, 1960: 282)

Evidently, if Prospero's purpose is to seek revenge, then the origin of his Art, which enables him to orchestrate the circumstances, will not be "white" as Goddard states. However, although his Art became tangible on the island, the process of acquiring already began in Milan before he was wronged, which suggests that they obtained a dark nature because of Prospero's betrayal. As Cosmo Corfield points out (1985):

Prospero is a powerful mage, but his powers are going in the wrong direction. Far from being holy and impassively just, they have become impurely applied to mean and personal ends. And Prospero's use of the phrase "rough magic" recognizes this. (Corfield, 1985: 42)

In other words: "it isn't so much the magic as the magician that is 'rough' (Corfield, 1985: 43), or who has become 'rough' due to the state of affairs.

It is through the vision of his Purpose that Prospero receives his murky disposition. Without Divine intervention, Prospero takes matters into his own hands and intends to impose moral justice by force. However, this "moral justice" is completely biased as it is built on the grounds of bitter resentment wherefore "Without such a clarity of vision, the exercise of his art may result in corruption for himself and chaos for those around him" (Egan, 1972: 175). Prospero tries to cast himself as an agent of divine retribution, claiming to act in the name of



God's justice at all times, but many spectators sense a darker motivation in him. In other words, the reader must look beyond Prospero's actions, to understand the real incentive behind them which is commonly viewed within this school of thought as revenge, and as such it will take the shape of inflicting what he and Miranda endured on his enemies:

The courtiers must repeat Prospero's primary suffering: the distress at sea, the absence of food, and the powerlessness in a hostile environment. Prospero takes pleasure in their suffering and then, when the moment is right, brings the suffering to an end in order to obtain his final purpose. (Hulme, 1986: 121)

This completely strips the protagonist from the titles of "good and wise" on which he was previously conferred by critics, and by contrast, characterizes him as "a snoopy and overbearing bully" (Frye, 1986: 172) and the island "a scene of the world's cruel tortures" (Kott, 1964: 189). Before their arrival, Prospero and Miranda lived somewhat peacefully on the island, however this harmony will be broken as soon as society comes ashore and Prospero relives his betrayal through the two coups which happen there (Caliban's against him and Antonio's against the King). In this sense, "Prospero's island is a scene symbolizing the real world, not a utopia" (Kott, 1964: 192).

The modern interpretation of Prospero's final Purpose tends to be concerned with more earthly disputes, such as the fight for power: "Prospero's project does not evolve around the kind of bloody revenge that results in tragedy, but the kind of euphemistic revenge that leads to the repossession of secure and legitimate power" (Breight, 1990: 27). The way to guarantee this power off the island is through a dynastic marriage:

The beauty of Prospero's revenge is that he not only regains Milan but also rests reasonably assured that his "issue" will rule both Naples and Milan. For Prospero, permanent exile on the island would have been a political as well as a personal graveyard, but the marriage alliance is an expansion. (Breight, 1990: 24)

In this sense, Prospero must listen to Ariel's advice and discern the optimal moment when to put an end to his enemies' suffering to allow his final purpose to take place. His ultimate aim

is not a tragic ending, but one which enables the expansion of his power and status back in Milan. Hence, in this reading, Miranda is used very cynically; as a pawn he can manoeuvre and manipulate to his advantage.

### 3.2. Felix

Art is fundamental for Felix and his character cannot be disassociated from his position as Artistic Director. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Felix's whole life has been built on his capacity to direct and produce artistic creations of the highest quality. Felix's position at the Festival is notably prestigious, making it only natural that Tony would be interested in having the title himself. To get there, however, Felix has had to work very hard and as such, he would not have wanted his own daughter to go through his struggle:

He's never wanted her to go into the theatre. It's too hard a life, it's too rough on the ego. There are so many rejections, so many disappointments, so many failures. You need a heart of iron, a skin of steel, the willpower of a tiger, and more of these as a woman. (Atwood: 167)

The world of the Arts, specifically theatre, moulded Felix into the person he was before his fall. As we learn from his interaction with other characters, especially during his termination in chapter 3. *Usurper* (Atwood: 18) Felix was arrogant and short-tempered, prizing his time and position above the rest:

"Let's make this short," Felix had opened, as was his habit. He'd noted with distaste the pattern of alternating hares and tortoises on Tony's red tie: an attempt at wittiness, no doubt. [...] "My list for today: number one, we need to replace the lighting guy, he's not giving me what I need." (Atwood: 18)

Felix considered himself as, quite literally, the "star of the show" where everyone around him was simply there to ensure that his vision would be realized, exactly the way he wanted it to be. If the productions received negative reviews, Felix would consider this a fault of the staff, never questioning his own performance or artistic capabilities:

"Bad reviews make you irritable," said Tony. "Then you take it out on the staff. It's bad for morale."

“I am *never* irritable!” Felix shouted. (Atwood: 21)

Immediately after being let go, Felix is only capable of blaming Tony and The Board for the situation. Although Felix mostly focuses on being deceived, the text shows evidence for there being other reasons why The Board took this decision, such as the many references to Felix having lost his “contact with reality” (Atwood: 20) after his misfortunes and behaviour towards his co-workers.

The twelve years of solitude preparing for his payback will also be a time of healing for Felix, where he will come to realize that his arrogance and selfishness also played an important role in his letting go. Tony’s tie bears an interesting meaning for the story as the hare and the tortoise represent Tony or Felix at different moments: Felix goes from being the hare to the tortoise, to then becoming the hare once more at the end of the novel. In this sense, we can detect that Tony’s “definite smirk” (Atwood: 21) is issued because he is about to make Felix pay for his pompous attitude.

Felix’s process of healing begins his job at Fletcher Correctional Institution where he teaches a Literacy Through Literature programme. After nine years Felix decided to go back to work in the hope that “re-engaging with people [...] would ground him” (Atwood: 48) after “too much time alone with his grief eating away at him” (Atwood: 48). To get the position, Felix, dubbed ‘Mr Duke’, “cobbled together a fraudulent resumé, forging decades-old letters of reference from several obscure schools” (Atwood: 48), which is precisely what the Art of actors is: assuming new identities to deceive an audience. Felix uses his Art to get the post where he will once again be staging Shakespeare’s plays, with the inmates acting out the roles. Through this opportunity, Felix artistically creates and directs *The Tempest* which his termination had left dormant. Since Felix’s isolation on his own “island” has brought a

projection of Miranda back, the Purpose of this production of the play will be entirely fuelled by Felix's desire for retaliation.

It is not only Felix who demands payback with this production, the Players (inmates at Fletcher) are furious after they hear that "Heritage Minister Price and Justice Minister O'Nally are pulling the plug on the [...] literacy program" (Atwood: 193) as they consider it "an indulgence, a raid on the taxpayer wallet, a pandering to the liberal elites, and a reward for criminality" (Atwood: 194). Felix uses this information to motivate the actors into putting on their best performance, while it also works in his favour as the dark, vengeful enactment will go unquestioned in this context. Therefore, the act of taking revenge through the play is a shared goal in the novel; it is a revolt against the corrupt as Caliban's reproachful song illustrates (Atwood: 230). Therefore, the Purpose of this production is for the enemies to suffer as Felix did, for Felix to be granted his position back at Makeshiweg, the program to maintain afloat and funded, and finally, for 8Handz to be given early parole for all his help.

Art plays such an important role in *Hag-Seed* that it seems to replace the Providential dimension as its function in our contemporary society is no longer paramount. The novel is delineated by an overall sense that its events happen casually, without any higher force, or supernatural Art, which causes them to occur. In other words, the novel portrays affairs and circumstances to simply happen without acknowledging a spiritual presence behind these. Estelle, the initiator of Fletcher Correctional Institution's Literacy Programme, embodies Shakespeare's "auspicious star" as she uses her connections to make necessary arrangements for Felix's revenge. However, her powers do not go further than "knowing the right people", as she is completely oblivious to Felix's motives and his painful past before Fletcher.

The actual retaliation itself takes the shape of a real-life, metadramatic staging of *The Tempest* with 'the enemies' being those involved in Felix's termination: Sal O'Nally, Tony

Price, Lonnie Gordon, Sebert Stanley, and Sal's son Frederick O'Nally, who have made their way into politics. Through drugs hidden in their drinks and injected in the grapes offered at the production, the group experiences what Felix calls "artistic immersion" (Atwood: 233). Each character undergoes the adventures their Shakespearean equivalent would in the play so that the different narratives would occur: there is a coup between Toni and Sebert to overthrow Sal and dispose of Lonnie, and Frederick becomes romantically interested in Anne-Marie after being taken hostage.

Felix aims to psychologically destroy the enemies in the same way he has been by forcing them to experience the same traumatic reality he lived through. This can be seen through two particular scenes which happen in the 'Green Room' at Fletcher:

Half blinded, choking, he blunders down to the fifties-period demonstration cell and collapses onto a bottom bunk. Scratchy grey blankets. Arms crossed on knees, head bowed. Lost at sea, drifting here, drifting there. In a rotten carcass the very rats have quit. (Atwood: 160)

After Felix had been asked by the inmates if he had a photograph of a loved one so that they could edit it into Prospero and Miranda's boat scene in the shape of a star in the sky with photographs of their children that "[help] them get through the rough parts" (Atwood: 160), he completely broke down, reliving the moment when he had to exile himself, both mentally and physically. Sal has a very similar reaction when he believes his son Freddie has died: "Sal is curled up in a corner of the room, clutching his knees. Tears are running down his cheeks; he's a diagram of woe" (Atwood: 228).

To sum up, Felix's Art is related to the world of theatre. He plays the role of an actor, as he uses his skills to assume new identities and will play Prospero in their production of *The Tempest*, and that of a director, as he manages the Players and their play, while manipulating events, such as using the information about the literacy program to motivate the actors to also seek revenge and using Estelle's connections to bring the party to the Institution. The Purpose

of the great Artistic production is the staging of *The Tempest* where the wrong-doers will experience on a first-hand basis, the suffering Felix has endured with the intention to maintain the literacy program at Fletcher as well as granting Felix his position as Artistic Director at the Festival, and an early parole for 8Handz. Thus, in this postmodern *Tempest*, art, rather than any belief in providence, plays a fundamental role in the process of personal healing, granting power, and seeking justice.

#### **4. Chapter Three: Forgiveness**

A question which has helped spark great part of the debate surrounding Shakespeare's Prospero is the end of the play when forgiveness is supposedly granted and 'the Avenger' gives up his magic to return to Milan. To begin analysing the role of forgiveness in each text and its reflection in our present-day society, we should first consider, in a context lacking Divine agency, where does, or should, revenge end. As Atwood mentions in her essay *Payback: Debt and the Shadow Side of Wealth*:

Such things cannot be quantified -they're evaluated subjectively, like art- so there's no way of telling whether any given revenge item has in fact evened the scales. Revenge, therefore, can quickly turn into a long chain reaction of revenges, each one worse than the last. (Atwood, 2008: 126)

##### **4.1. Prospero**

Considering that Prospero's purpose is to regain his former position as Duke of Milan and for a dynastic marriage between Miranda and Ferdinand, Prospero must discern the optimal moment when to end his "revels", something which he appears to struggle with. Prospero's decision is actually sparked by Ariel's heartfelt description of the characters and his suggestion to free them after the spirit's transformation into a harpy to rebuke the party for their sins:

ARIEL

They cannot budge till your release. The King,  
His brother, and yours abide all three distracted,  
And the remainder mourning over them,

Brimful of sorrow and dismay; but chiefly  
Him that you termed, sir, the good old lord Gonzalo.  
His tears runs down his beard like winter's drops  
From eaves of reeds. Your charm so strongly works 'em  
That if you now beheld them, your affections  
Would become tender.

PROSPERO

Dost thou think so, spirit?

ARIEL

Mine would, sir, were I human.

PROSPERO

And mine shall. (5.1.11-20)

Prospero appears to be taken back by the Spirit's compassion as he is not even human, unlike Prospero, to whom it had not yet occurred to stop their suffering. Prospero does not readily see that it is "Ariel [who] tutors [him] in how to be human, how to be kind" (Beckwith, 2011: 149).

In fact, Prospero

thinks that it is his reason that overcomes his fury. But what has just happened contradicts him. It was his angel that whispered the suggestion in his ear. And a man's angel or genius is not to be confused with the man himself (Goddard, 1960: 283)

Therefore, without a moral code of justice, Prospero struggles to find forgiveness and requires a pagan magical Spirit to indicate that perhaps his Purpose has been served and the group has been sufficiently punished. This is symbolically important as, without Divine intervention, Prospero agrees to unbind them from his Art on the basis that he will gain something in return; this ultimately being power. In this reading, "Prospero simply sheds his magic as a snake sheds its outworn skin, and proceeds to higher things" (Corfield, 1985: 33).

In order to return to society, and reap the benefits he has worked hard to achieve, Prospero must abjure his magic by breaking his staff and drowning his book (5.1.49-57) and freeing Ariel for his services. However, there is an uneasy feeling about the ending as forgiveness is not granted on the bases of true moral growth, but as a means to an end. As Kott

comments “there is no peace, and no surrender” in Prospero’s face (Kott, 1964: 197), but he is not the only character who does not yield. Despite Prospero publicly forgiving the party, “[Antonio] expresses no remorse as the play ends” (Boorman, 1987: 262). In *Payback*, Atwood states that in a situation of debt, both the creditor and debtor are to blame if their agreement has been unsuccessful (Atwood, 2007: 128), therefore, in a context such as that presented between the two brothers, where the payment due is measured in power and betrayal, both parties need forgiveness, or some form of compensation. If Antonio does not play his part in the act of forgiving, the arrangement is fruitless. This shows that, although Prospero’s magic does have an effect on his enemies, without the Divine element “The implied suggestion is that magic gives only mastery over material things, not that inner moral power that Prospero must finally achieve to justify his true pre-eminence” (Boorman, 1987: 266).

Thus, at the end of the play, one wonders whether one has witnessed forgiveness and a true change of heart or not at all. Furthermore, in a post-Christian society which thinks of itself as governing its own fate, can the cycle of revenge be broken without creating winners or losers, that is to say, can its end be anything other than a defeat for the forgiven party? Additionally, can we even talk about forgiveness as a secular society?

#### **4.2. Felix**

Considering that Margaret Atwood’s *Hag-Seed* is set within this critical framework, the questions on atonement which the original play stimulate, can also be found in this re-writing. Felix’s curtain call provides both postulations surrounding them and brings new questions to the discussion.

To begin with, as I mentioned in Chapter 2, the actual process leading up to the revenge is, for Felix, a journey of healing. By being forced to step down from his high position and losing everything valuable to him, Felix’s sense of morality grows during his time working at



Fletcher, which is fairly cynical as this stems from him teaching the inmates at a correctional institution. An example of this change is evident when Felix discovers that Anne-Marie is leading -the already in love- “WonderBoy” on, for their love scene to be even more realistic:

“You’re ruthless! That’s unethical,” he said.

“Don’t preach, I learned from the best. Everything for the play, right? That’s how you put it twelve years ago. As I recall.”

That was then, Felix thought. Would I say it today? “I’ll talk to him,” said Felix. “Straighten things out.” (Atwood: 184)

Anne-Marie has not forgotten Felix’s past behaviour and she rebukes him for suddenly lecturing her on her priorities as an actress. Felix’s reaction suggests that *his* own priorities have changed significantly, where he now cares more about fairness than producing the perfect production. Robert Egan sees Prospero’s art in this light:

He has, in a very real sense, confused his role as an artist with that of a god, forgetting his humanity in the process. In presuming to substitute his own sense of morality for cosmic law he has designated to himself a higher order of being and the authority to damn and destroy his fellow men: in effect, he has usurped the divine prerogative of vengeance. (Egan, 1972: 177)

Before is his fall, Felix had considered himself a demigod, as the “*the* Felix Phillips” (Atwood: 196) and dictated without much compassion those who worked around him. It is not until he “no longer rates a *the*” (Atwood: 196) and begins giving back by teaching the programme, that Felix regains his humanity. Although this change might not be significant enough to encourage Felix to pardon his enemies, it does show that the character has grown considerably and his mindfulness has greatly improved.

In the same way Prospero needed Ariel to encourage him to put an end to the enemies’ suffering, Felix will also need a signal -or three. The party is in the Green Room in a drug-infused hell with Felix watching the scene on screen in the Control Room with 8Handz who is managing the special effects.

“You sure you maybe didn’t overdo it?” says 8Handz. “With the grapes? This is, like, over the top.”

“I followed the instructions,” says Felix. He wanted anguish and he’s got it. But should drug-induced anguish really count?” (Atwood: 228)

Felix is watching his enemies anguish in their trip, however, the scene even moves 8Handz, a convicted felon at Fletcher, to question the morality of the performance. Felix, on the other hand, stays extremely objective and answers that he followed the instructions on how to drug them, suggesting that, by following the instructions correctly means that the results should also be correct, not even considering the aspect of principles which 8Handz does. Instead, Felix is thinking ahead, almost as if asking himself whether revenge through drugs is enough. 8Handz tries to bring Felix around a second time, questioning him directly on his compassion:

“I know they’re assholes and they’re trying to snuff our Players, but this is too sick even for me,” says 8Handz. “It’s beyond a bad trip, they’re scared shitless.”

“It’s part of the plan. Anyway, they had it coming,” says Felix.

“Don’t you feel sorry for them?” says 8Handz. (Atwood: 230-231)

Hence, for 8Handz, revenge has been sufficiently dealt because for him, and the Players, the Purpose of the production was to make them pay for cutting the literacy programme’s funding and hoping they would be coerced into reinstating it, not knowing that their teacher had personal motives on the side. Therefore, their sense of judgment on when to put an end to the enemies’ suffering is completely different, as both the origin of their anger and the goal of their reprisal are unlike Felix’s. For Felix, this is the grand moment that he has been waiting for and is not prompted to cease it any sooner than necessary, for in his mind “Retribution may be slow in coming, but when it does come, the wicked will be crushed to dust” (Atwood, 2008: 141).

The final, and successful intervention comes from his daughter’s projection immediately following the previous passage:

All this time Miranda has been hovering behind him -a shadow a wavering of the light - though she’s been silent: there haven’t been any lines to prompt. But now she whispers, I would, sir, were I human. She’s such a tender-hearted girl. (Atwood, 2016: 231)

Felix’s projection of Miranda has also been watching the show without interceding at any moment. It is highly symbolic that she is given a voice at this moment. Throughout the play,

Felix has imagined and created Miranda to suit the perfect image of the daughter he lost, it is most relevant that her goodness is what provokes Felix to stop his enemies suffering. Although Miranda is nothing but a project of Felix's imagination, she is a voice of virtue in his life. Felix does not listen to 8Handz because his humanity is not appealing to him, but he does listen to Miranda because she represents the only thing of virtue present in his life which could be capable of such compassion. Atwood claims that "Without memory there is no debt" (Atwood, 2008: 141), in this novel, it is Miranda's memory which quantifies the weight of the debt, and since the play is atoning this, Miranda's memory has authority over when the debt has been settled.

Once Felix reveals himself in front of his enemies dressed as Prospero, he then gives them the joint list of demands for the Players and himself. Naturally, the party believes that Felix has finally become insane and refuses to cooperate. Felix then disclaims that they are obliged to comply with the requests or else he will release the recorded footage on the internet: their drugged experience and the coup against Sal and Lonnie. In reaction to Felix's blackmail Tony says: "That's not fair", to which Felix answers: "Let's call it balancing the scales" (Atwood: 234), however; have the scales really been balanced? Felix announces that "under these conditions I pardon all of you, and we'll let bygones be bygones" (Atwood: 235). The fact that Felix is using extortion to achieve his agenda means that he does not seriously consider absolution, contrary to what he announces. Furthermore, Felix keeps the memory stick where the footage is stored in case it "might prove crucial at some future time, because you never know." (Atwood: 238) meaning that he will be waiting ready to pounce in the case they do not answer his demands.

Perhaps this is the reason why Felix does not feel satisfied after the performance:

"Anyway I succeeded," he tells himself. "Or at least I didn't fail." Why does it feel like a letdown?

The rarer action is/ In virtue than in vengeance, he hears her inside his head.  
It's Miranda. She's prompting him. (Atwood: 239)

Felix feels unsatisfied because, although he regained his position at the Festival, the root of his grievance was not purely political, but stemmed from his initial suffering caused by the death of his wife and daughter. As Martha Nussbaum points out in her recent full-scale study of these matters: "Malpractice litigation does not resurrect the dead, nor does a punitive divorce settlement restore love. Indeed, in both cases the payback project likely jeopardizes future happiness rather than advancing it." (Nussbaum, 2016: 29). This is because Miranda's memory will also have authority over Felix's debt with himself. As Felix comes to realise in the very last scene of the novel:

"Farewell," he says to it. "My so potent art".

It comes over him in a wave: he's been wrong about his *Tempest*, wrong for twelve years. The endgame of his obsession wasn't to bring his Miranda back to life. The endgame was something quite different. (Atwood: 283)

Felix is saying goodbye to the artefacts that played a role in his artistic creations and at that moment understands that he needs to say goodbye to his biggest creation: his projection of Miranda. In other words, Felix becomes aware that, by keeping Miranda's memory alive, neither of the two can have closure and Felix cannot forgive himself. With this knowledge, Felix grants her liberty, but ultimately the freedom of the both father and daughter.

Shortly put, in a post-Christian society, the act of forgiveness is no longer a divine absolution of sins, but rather a journey of healing and knowing when to release the memory of debt or of sorrow. Felix Phillips is not freed from his misery through getting revenge as the outcome of the production is simply to reinstate powers which the enemies had taken away, rather than core moral values. This is due to the fact that Felix ultimately needed to forgive himself and let go of his daughter's memory, and, to put it bluntly, move on.

## 5. Conclusion

Margaret Atwood's contribution to the *Hogarth Shakespeare Project* with *Hag-Seed* is an excellent reinterpretation of *The Tempest* situated in our 21<sup>st</sup> century Western society. As is with all attempts to reproduce an artistic piece, the writer was faced with the necessity to side with a particular interpretation of its characters and meaning. For the sake of this dissertation I provided a background on the two main schools of thought regarding Prospero, "the Artist" and "the Avenger" and concluded that Atwood's Felix Phillips assumed the role of the "Avenger" as he does not belong to a reading which considers the protagonist as a divine agent of retribution or moral sage, but rather one that views Prospero as an angry Duke who uses his profane Art to gain more power and does not live according to higher moral codes which hold forgiveness as an ultimate goal.

Felix, thus, assumes the role of "the Avenger" as he desperately seeks revenge against those which terminated him at his job as Artistic Director at Makeshiweg Theatre Festival, hindering him from staging *The Tempest*, which he hoped would bring his daughter Miranda back to life. This addition along with the backstory of his wife's death, bring Felix closer to the reader as he appeals to our sympathy while providing a form of justification for his thirst for revenge. This psychological explanation to his thirst for revenge shows the contemporary audience's necessity to understand the cause of a character's dark motivations as we no longer categorise in terms of strictly "good" or "bad", but rather search for secular circumstances which account for their moral conduct. Furthermore, the two flashes into Felix's past also alert us that his grief and anger make him a completely unreliable narrator, and should, thus be treated as such.

Felix's Art is related to 'the arts', specifically theatre. In the novel, he plays both the role of an actor; assuming new identities that will enable him to fulfil his purpose, and of a

director; through teaching the literary programme and by manipulating people and situations to work in favour of bringing his purpose together. However, during his time at Fletcher directing the Players, Felix undergoes a journey of healing and of mindfulness through teaching the literacy programme. He comes to see himself amongst others, instead of above them which he did before his termination, and learns to respect his fellow actors, to the extent that he even empathises with them if they are mistreated. Furthermore, Felix's new unpretentious attitude allows him to see that he was also to blame for his hardship and begins to take more responsibility for the reasons behind being let go by the Festival.

The purpose of *The Tempest* has now become a common goal for both Felix and the Players at Fletcher as both parties have specific interests. On one hand Felix wants his former position back while causing his enemies the same suffering he has endured, on the other the Players want revenge on their enemies for cutting the literacy programme's funding and to be given the opportunity to force them to keep the programme afloat. This is achieved through a drug-infused, metafictional staging of Shakespeare's play where they will take justice into their own hands. Therefore, in this contemporary reproduction, art plays a central role in personal healing, building a sense of community, seeking justice and reinstating power, in other words, art can be seen as a substitute for divine intervention in this post-Christian society.

Following this line of thought, in a context where Christianity is no longer paramount, morality is judged on a different set of scales. In this rendering of *The Tempest*, the nature of the transgression is the element which determines when revenge is sufficiently dealt. For the Players, the party should not have to endure their suffering for long as their own grievance is purely political, hence why 8Handz signals Felix to end their anguish, however, Felix's own motives for reprisal are based on his traumatic backstories which demand a higher price for the scales to be settled, one which is fixed by Miranda's projection.

Felix and the Players successfully achieve their goals yet Felix's sense of emptiness following the performance is caused by the realization that the origin of his pain was not simply a grievance against Toni and The Board, but was caused by his personal losses, and that his purpose was beyond simply seeking revenge, instead it was a dire necessity to face the grief and responsibility he was escaping through art and anger, and, most importantly, to forgive himself in order to move forward. This moment marks the culmination of Felix's healing process and the path to his freedom. In this contemporary novel, Felix's emotional restoration does not come from a celestial power, as post-Christian alternatives such as artistic creation have supplanted the possibility to remedy and forgive. After twelve years, Felix Phillips is finally ready to address his pain and let go of the guilt he felt surrounding his daughter's death and embrace the liberty granted to him through forgiving himself.

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